

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, ranking members Kissel and Fishbein and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Joanne Kirson, I am from Norwalk and a supporter of CT Against Gun Violence.

I am testifying in favor of HB-6355, An Act Concerning Risk Protection Orders.

In 2019, only two risk warrants were issued in Connecticut for individuals who posed a credible threat of a mass shooting. One of them was my son, Brandon Wagshol.

He was arrested at his father's house in August 2019, shortly after the Dayton and El Paso massacres. The police and FBI took four high-capacity gun magazines, tactical equipment, 120 rounds of ammunition and body armor. When arrested, he stated his intention to build a high-capacity firearm. He told ME that he was 90% done building the firearm. He was charged with possession of the illegal gun magazines, which he bought legally in New Hampshire.

He was arrested again in February 2020 for assaulting his father. He is currently in jail on half a million dollars bond awaiting disposition of the seven felony charges against him.

As background: Brandon had been suspended from public school constantly, mostly due to violence or threats of violence. We had cases with DCF, DDS and the juvenile courts. In 2013, after he was expelled from the special ed high school for at-risk youth, I went into court armed with a letter from his treating psychiatrist stating that he needed a residential placement. What actually happened was that the court moved him from my home and legal custody to that of my ex-husband, the gun enthusiast. This was the last failure of the system for Brandon as a juvenile. The system failed him so many times. It failed Brandon, it failed me and it failed you.

In March 2018, I heard loud banging in my house. It was Brandon, trashing everything. He also tried to set a fire. When I confronted him, he packed up his stuff and went to his father's. I called the police and he was arrested. I made a victim statement in which I said I wanted to ensure that he'd never have access to firearms. The case was dismissed, and by this time, my ex-husband had guns.

I ask that you favorably report HB-6355 out of committee so that the General Assembly can vote to strengthen our Extreme Risk Protection law so that it works harder to prevent firearm suicide, homicide and mass shootings. The case of Brandon Wagshol shows that the law works. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Joanne Kirson
Norwalk, CT

